

TEACHERS' COMPETENCES AS PREDICTOR OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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ABSTRACT

Academic engagement is a critical factor influencing students' learning outcomes, motivation, and overall well-being. Despite various educational policies and investments in Nigeria, many students in public secondary school struggle with low engagement, affecting their academic success. This study examined teachers' competence as predictors of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. A simple regression design was adopted, with a sample of 553 senior secondary school students drawn from a population of 23,040. Data were collected using structured questionnaires the Teachers' Competencies Questionnaire (TCQ) and the Students' Academic Engagement Questionnaire (SAEQ). Simple regression analysis was used to analyze the data at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that professional competence is a strong predictor of students' academic engagement ($R^2 = 0.660$, $p = 0.041$) and social competence ($R^2 = 0.555$, $p = 0.026$) revealed a moderate predictor of students' academic engagement. These results highlight the crucial role of teacher training and continuous professional development in enhancing instructional delivery and fostering student participation through relationship. Therefore, the study recommends that school administrators and policymakers prioritize teacher development programs that focus on refining, positive teacher-student relationships, and enhancing professional growth through workshops and ongoing training. Incorporating mentorship programs where experienced educators guide less experienced teachers can help bridge knowledge gaps and promote best teaching practices.

Keywords: Teachers' Competence, Academic Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Educational institutions require the right caliber of teachers to achieve the objective for which they were established. Education is a vital instrument for obtaining essential knowledge, skills, mindset, and principles that foster personal growth, character development, and self-sufficiency, ultimately contributing to the betterment of society (Okaforcha & Okeke, 2020).

The importance of education to national growth and development cannot be overemphasized especially when it concerns students' academic engagements. The realization of the goals of public secondary education is reflected in the academic engagement of students (Okaforcha, 2024). Academic engagement is a critical aspect of students' educational experience, as it influences their academic achievement, motivation, and overall well-being. The National Policy on Education is a policy document of the government that contains the philosophy of Nigeria education. It presents the goals, purposes and orientations of all levels and aspects of the education system (Ezema, 2019).

To show governmental commitment to the educational development of the country, the country has signed various documents making commitments to educational development such as the Education for All (EFA) and the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as invested massively in both human and financial resources.

Despite these efforts, it has been observed that many students have low levels of academic engagement, which makes it difficult for them to succeed academically even in the face of efforts to enhance academic outcomes.

The very word 'engagement' is commonly used to denote such meanings as commitment, agency, and reciprocity, which makes the concept largely synonymous with the personally involving participation in some activity. In addition, the term 'engagement' is sometimes used as a synonym to such words as active, attentive, interest, motivation, and effort (Conner, 2018).

Students' academic engagement refers to a student's state of mind with regard to dedication and absorption of learning content. Omolewa, (2018) defined academic engagement as the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has partaken and achieved their educational goals. Bossaert et al., (2021) defined academic engagement as student's success in meeting short or long term goals in education in the big picture. Academic engagement shapes students' everyday experiences in school, both psychologically and socially (Randall & King, 2018).

Students' academic engagement has been influenced by so many factors that a lot of careful researchers have attempted to find out the factors that predict the academic engagement of students especially in public secondary schools. Among so many factors which include parental support, peer group influence that influences students' academic engagement in schools, teachers' competence is a variable to be considered.

Competency is viewed as a result of learning, a range of issues in which an individual is versed, or as a body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while competence is interpreted as an ability to carry out a certain type of activity on the basis of corresponding competencies resulting in acquiring personal qualities.

Lu (2018) stated that competence includes conventional abilities, essential aptitudes, fundamental abilities and individual aptitudes which allude to information and abilities just as the mentality of a person.

Teachers' competence is defined as those learnable and teachable skills that are related to the way in which the teacher has carried out the activities and what results have been achieved. Sultan and Shafi (2014) defined teachers' competence as particular and self-evident qualities that teachers should have for effective teaching. Teachers' competence should always be assessed. Assessment plays a vital role in the teaching-learning process, as it enables the provision of constructive feedback to both educators and students, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness and quality of education (Adinna et al., 2021).

It is clarified that teachers are said to be competent if they have already fulfilled the four main competencies: (1) communication competence, (2) pedagogical competence, (3) social competence, (4) professional competence, (5) Curriculum competence; all of which are integrated into teacher's achievement (Wouldiam, 2017). However, the study would be limited to professional competence and social competence.

The development of professional competence is a core issue in all discussion of what makes an "effective teacher". Insights into why teachers show different levels of professional competence can be expected to inform both teacher education and recruitment of more suitable candidate to the teaching profession. The term teachers' professional competence refers to the set of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, capacities and beliefs people need for success in a profession. Teachers need to connect students with prior knowledge, life experience and their interests with learning goals. They also must use a variety of instructional strategies and resources to respond to students varied needs (Farah & Mohad, 2015). Teachers also need to facilitate learning experiences that promote autonomy, interaction and choice. Teacher professional competencies can have effect on how the teacher effectively manage the classroom significantly because a competent teacher has the ability to manage the classroom effectively, use an array of instructional materials, ensure instructional effectiveness and adopt effective strategies for teaching and learning which helps the teacher.

Social competence refers to attributes that are necessary to manage social and emotional development in the classroom or in the school which might help the teacher. Klieme et al., (2018) defined social competence of the teacher as the ability of the teacher to adapt to the demands of work and the surrounding environment when carrying out duties. Social interactions with students are particularly relevant for teachers' occupational well-being (Schmidt et al, 2017). There is ample evidence that student misbehaviour and problems with classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with heterogeneity, or the establishment of relationships to students constitute major setback for teachers especially if the teacher lacks social competence.

Teachers are the implementers of the curriculum; they set standards and ensure the quality and effectiveness of education. However, there has been no consensus on the importance of specific teacher factor, leading to the common conclusion that the existing empirical evidence does not find a strong role for teachers in the determination of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This study therefore, seeks to investigate teachers' competencies as predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary school in Anambra State.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Academic engagement shapes students' everyday experiences in school, both psychologically and socially. Despite its importance, many students struggle with academic engagement, leading to decreased

academic success, increased dropout rates, and diminished educational motivation. Students' academic engagements of most secondary school students in public schools in Anambra State have been low. Various studies have looked at the issue of students' academic engagement in the classroom. A significant part of a lack of students' academic engagement in the classroom or the school may be due to teacher' competencies. This may be because of the increase in the employment and retention of incompetent teachers that lacks content knowledge in most public secondary schools in Anambra State.

This is worrisome, as low levels of academic engagement has negative effects, one being a lack of academic achievement. Dropping out of school is the most severe effect and is the culmination of many forms of disengagement, absenteeism, poor overall attitude about school, and greater number of discipline referrals. These effects of student disengagement are most severe among minority students, whose group scores are lower in achievement and higher in drop-out rates.

Effectiveness of teachers' competence can low because of absenteeism from school, lateness to school, non-preparation of lesson notes, failure to mark students exercise books, involvement in examination malpractices, illegal collection of money from parents and unapproved study leave with pay. These are serious threat to all levels of our educational system, because teachers are the expected professionals, entrusted with the responsibility to conserve, protect and sustain the future and destiny of the nation (Adinna & Okafor, 2023).

Due to this trend, the concept of students' academic engagement has received increasing attention. One could then ask does teachers' competence predict students' academic engagement?.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine teachers' competencies as predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study seeks to;

1. establish the predictive value of professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. determine the predictive value of social competence on students' academic engagement s in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions would guide the study:

- 1 What is the predictive value of professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
- 2 What is the predictive value of social competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

1.5 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated and would be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- 1) Professional competence is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
- 2) Social competence is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter is concerned mainly on the method or procedure used for the research. It includes area of the study, population of the study, sample and sampling technique, instrument for data collection, validation of the instrument, reliability of the instrument and method of data analysis.

This study was carried out in Anambra State which is one of the 36 States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Located in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, Anambra State comprises six Education Zones (Aguata, Awka, Otuocha, Nnewi, Ogidi and Onitsha) and 21 Local Government Areas namely: Aguata, Orumba North, Orumba South, Anaocha, Awka North, Dunukofia, Njikoka, Awka South, Ekwusigo, Ihiala, Idemili North, Idemili South, Oyi, Onitsha North, Onitsha South, Ogbaru, Anambra East, Anambra West, and Ayamelum with 268 public secondary schools (Anambra State Post Primary School Services Commission, 2024). The population for the study would consist of 23,040 SS II students in the 2023/2024 session from the 267 public secondary schools in Anambra State. (Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC), Awka, Anambra State, 2024). The sample for the study would consist of 557 which would be drawn from the population of 23,040 SS II students in the 2023/2024 academic session. The stratified and simple random sampling techniques would be used to draw the sample.

The major instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. Two instruments were used for data collection. The first instrument was structured by researcher and titled “Teachers’ Competencies Questionnaire (TCQ)” with two sections: Section A contains information on the demographic variables of the respondents while B which contains the item statements on teachers’ competencies in line with the study research questions in four clusters of 10 item statements in each cluster.

The second instrument is Students’ Academic Engagement Questionnaire (SAEQ)”. It is adapted from Appleton, Christenson, Kim, and Reschly, A.L. developed in 2006. It is in one cluster with 20 items structured along optional responses, in the following order: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), and SD (Strongly Disagree). 557 copies of instrument were administered, 553 were retrieved and used for data analysis. This represented 98% return rate and 2% loss. The data collected would be analyzed using simple linear regression statistics for research question and hypotheses Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.523) suggestion for assessing the goodness of fit of regression model using squared regression coefficient (R^2):

For R^2 :

0 – 0.1	Weak Fit
0.1 – 0.3	Modest Fit
0.3 – 0.5	Moderate Fit
> 0.5	Strong Fit

For the hypotheses, p-value was used to determine the significance of the prediction at 0.05 level of significance

For p-value when

- P-value < .05: Reject H_0 and Accept H_1
- P-value > .05: Accept H_0 and Reject H_1

4.0 RESULT AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents the results and analysis of teacher's competence as predictors of students' academic engagement as well as the decision on hypothesis.

Research question 1. What is the predictive value of Professional competence on students' academic engagement in public schools in Anambra state?

Table I: Summary of simple regression analysis on the predictive value of professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State;

Predictor variable	Unstandardized B	SE B	Standardized β	Remark
Constant	1.21	1.315		
Professional competence	.656	.31	.548	Strong positive
R	.812			
R^2	.66			
Adj R^2	.652			

Table 1. The table presenting the simple regression analysis indicates that professional competence is a strong positive predictor of students' academic engagement. This is inferred from the regression coefficient ($R = .812$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .66$), which shows that professional competence explains 66% of the variance in students' academic engagement. The adjusted R-square (Adj $R^2 = .652$) further supports this, indicating that professional competence accounts for approximately 65.2% of the variance in students' academic engagement.

The unstandardized beta weight ($B = .656$) shows that professional competence is a positive predictor of students' academic engagement, meaning that a unit increase in professional competence leads to a .656 corresponding increase in students' academic engagement. Additionally, the standardized beta ($\beta = .548$) reinforces the strength of this relationship. The table also reveals that professional competence predicts 81.2% of students' academic engagement.

Therefore, we can conclude that professional competence is a strong predictor of students' academic engagement, emphasizing its critical role in enhancing student participation and involvement.

Hypothesis 1: Professional competence is not a significant predictor students’ academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 2: Test of simple regression analysis on the predictive value of professional competence and students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state.

Predictor variable	Unstandardized B	SE B	Standardized β	P value	Remark
Constant	1.21	1.315		.3	
Professional competence	.656	.31	.548	.41	Significant
R	.812				
R ²	.66				
F	.732				

Significant at P value <0.5

The Table above indicates that the regression coefficient (R) is .812 while the R² = .66. The F-ratio associated with regression is with the *P-value* = 0.41. Since the *P-value* is less than the stipulated .5 confidence level, the null hypothesis is rejected and thus is decided that teachers professional competence is a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state.

Research Question 2. What is the is the predictive value of Social competence on students' academic engagement?

Table 3: Summary of a simple regression analysis on the predictive value of social competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Predictor variable	Unstandardized B	SE B	Standardized β	Remark
Constant	1.188	1.287		
Social competence	.487	.276	.425	Moderate positive
R	.745			
R ²	.555			
Adj R ²	.548			

Table 3 The table presenting the simple regression analysis indicates that social competence is a moderate positive predictor of students' academic engagement. This is inferred from the regression coefficient (R = .745) and the coefficient of determination (R² = .555), which shows that social competence explains 55.5% of the variance in students' academic engagement. The adjusted R-square (Adj R² = .548) further supports this, indicating that social competence accounts for approximately 54.8% of the variance in students' academic engagement.

The unstandardized beta weight (B = .487) shows that social competence is a positive predictor of students' academic engagement, meaning that a unit increase in social competence leads to a .487 corresponding increase in students' academic engagement. Additionally, the standardized beta (β = .425) reinforces the strength of this relationship. The table also reveals that social competence predicts 74.5% of students' academic engagement.

Therefore, we can conclude that social competence is a moderate predictor of students' academic engagement, highlighting its role in shaping student involvement and participation.

Hypothesis 2: Social competence is not a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Table 4: Test of Significance of simple regression analysis on the predictive value of social competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state.

Predictor variable	Unstandardized B	SE B	Standardized β	P value	Remark
Constant	1.188	1.287		.1	
Social competence	.487	.276	.425	.26	Significant
R	.745				
R ²	.555				
F	5.21				

Significant at P value <0.5

The Table above indicates that the regression coefficient (R) is .745 while the R² = .555. The F-ratio associated with regression is with the *P-value* = 0.26. Since the *P-value* is less than the stipulated .5 confidence level, the null hypothesis is rejected and thus is decided that teachers social competence is a significant predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state.

Summary of the Findings

The study findings are summarized as follows:

1. The study showed that professional competence is a strong predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state.
2. The study showed that social competence is a moderate predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state.

5.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings are discussed under the following headings:

1. verify the predictive value of professional competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

The study showed that professional competence is a strong predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state ($R^2 = .66$, $p = 0.41$). This suggests that teachers' expertise, subject mastery, and continuous professional development are essential factors in enhancing students' academic performance and engagement. Teachers who possess a deep understanding of their subject matter and apply innovative teaching strategies are better equipped to facilitate meaningful learning experiences and maintain students' interest in academic activities.

Supporting this, Thames and Phelps (2017) examined professional competence in teaching at Michigan University, focusing on the need for pre-service teachers to assess their understanding of subject matter during training. Their study showed that active learning, observation, and instructional practice help teachers recognize that mastering a subject differs from effectively teaching it. This aligns with the current study, as it brings to light the importance of ongoing professional development in shaping teachers' abilities to engage students effectively.

Conversely, Akpan (2022) found a negative, moderate significant relationship between teachers' professional skills and students' attitudes toward Biology in Akwa Ibom State ($r = -.552$, $p < 0.5$). While this finding contrasts with the present study, it gives insight into the complexity of teacher competence and its varying impacts on student engagement. The discrepancy may be attributed to differences in instructional approaches, subject areas, or students' learning preferences. However, both studies reinforce the idea that professional competence influences students' academic engagement, and so there is the need for continuous teacher training and skill development.

2. find out the predictive value of social competence on students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra State

The findings of this study showed that social competence is a moderate predictor of students' academic engagement in public secondary schools in Anambra state ($R^2 = .555$, $p = 0.26$). This suggests that teachers who build positive relationships with students, provide emotional support, and foster an inclusive and welcoming classroom environment significantly enhance students' willingness to participate and engage in academic activities. A socially competent teacher is not only able to effectively communicate with students but also understand their emotional and social needs, which in turn fosters higher levels of engagement and motivation in the learning process (Schmidt et al., 2017).

Research supports the critical role of social competence in student engagement. For instance, Aldrup et al. (2017) found that student misbehavior, classroom discipline issues, lack of motivation, and ineffective teacher-student relationships contribute to student disengagement in schools. Conversely, their study demonstrated that positive teacher-student interactions serve as a protective factor, helping to maintain students' well-being and prevent emotional exhaustion, particularly among less experienced teachers. This aligns with the present study's findings, reinforcing the idea that a teacher's ability to establish supportive and respectful relationships with students enhances engagement and learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study concludes that;

Professional competence contributes significantly to students' academic engagement by ensuring that teachers possess the necessary subject knowledge, instructional expertise, and continuous professional development. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive teacher development programs that integrate effective communication, instructional strategies, interpersonal skills, and subject expertise to optimize student engagement in public secondary school.

Social competence is essential in fostering a conducive learning environment that enhances engagement. Teachers who build positive relationships with students, demonstrate empathy, and create an

inclusive classroom atmosphere contribute significantly to students' willingness to participate in learning activities.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1 Teachers should adopt diverse and interactive teaching methods to improve student engagement.
- 2 Schools should encourage positive teacher-student relationships to foster a supportive learning environment.
- 3 Continuous professional development should be mandated for teachers to ensure they remain updated on best practices in education.

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